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Article

Exploring the contents of blind's dream: A phenomenological study

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Abstract: This study explores the dream experiences of visually impaired individuals in Pakistan, with particular emphasis on sensory perception, daydreaming, emotional regulation, and optimism. A qualitative research design was employed by a phenomenological approach that would be used to capture the lived experiences of the visually impaired people. The sampling method was a purposive sample of 16 participants who were semi-structured interviewed, comprising of both congenitally blind and late-blind. Thematic analysis was considered to analyse the data in accordance with the framework of Braun and Clarke. The analysis of the results shows that the content of dreams in blind people is mainly of non-visual character, as it is based on auditory, tactile, and kinaesthetic impressions. Those who became blind later in life said that they saw a visual image a few times every now and then, but those who were born blind said that they had a dream experience that was purely non-visual. Besides, daydreaming was also discovered to have a significant role in influencing internal experiences, allowing the participants to build imagined situations and dwell upon future desires. The dreams were also highly socialised and people were identified by voice, behaviour and emotional attachment other than external appearance. The research finds a conclusion that the dream experience of the visually impaired individuals is complex and multidimensional, which is influenced by the process of adaptation to the sensory stimuli and the process of emotion.

Keywords: *Dreaming, visual impairment, blind individuals, daydreaming, emotional regulation, phenomenology*

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Introduction

Visual impairment and especially blindness is a major sensory impairment that form the perception of the world by people and affects their cognitive, emotional, and social lives. The World Health Organization observes that millions of individuals across the world are experiencing visual impairment and thus, they experience challenges in mobility, communication, and access to information daily. In spite of these limitations, blind people evolve adaptive means that are based on the use of non-visual senses such as hearing, touch, and smell of things in order to interpret the world around them.

Dreaming is an essential part of human cognition, which may be characterized by complicated interplay of memory, emotion and sensory processing at the moment of sleep, and especially in the rapid eye movement (REM) stage (Domhoff, 2003; Hobson, 2009). Although the dreams of the sighted are mostly visual in nature, studies have shown that dream experiences in the blind people vary greatly depending on the time of occurrence and the extent of visual disability. As an illustration, Christina S. Hurovitz et al. (1999) discovered that even congenitally blind people dream of what they call as dreamless dreams, which do not depict visual images, but contain more audio, tactile and emotional elements. Conversely, people who lost their sight at older age will still have a visual element in their dreams depending on the visual memory.

This is also evidenced by other studies like A. Meaidi et al. (2014) that showed that the blind people have more non-visual sensory contents in their dream than the normal people, who include feeling, moving, and hearing. In the same manner, G. W. Domhoff (1996, 2003) stressed that dream content is based on the experience in waking life, and it means that the non-visual perception of everyday life shapes the dream structure and content.

Other psychological constructs associated with dreaming like daydreaming, emotional regulation and optimism are also very important in determining the internal experiences of a person. It is noted that emotional processing and cognitive flexibility have been linked to daydreaming which is sometimes defined as spontaneous and self-generated thought (Smallwood and Schooler, 2015). Emotional regulation can be defined as the processes by which people impact their emotional reactions (Gross, 1998), whereas optimism is a tendency to expect positive results in the future (Carver and Scheier, 2014). The constructs can be used specifically in the case of people with visual impairment because they can be used as copes in the encounter of social and environmental limitations.

Although much has been researched on dreaming and sensory perception, not much is known about how the visually impaired form and perceive dream experiences under certain socio-cultural settings especially in developing nations like Pakistan. Most of the current researches have been done within the Western context and have been mostly quantitative or experimental in nature with minimal consideration being given to qualitative or phenomenological work which encompasses the lived experiences.

As such, the proposed study will take the phenomenological perspective in understanding the contents of dreams in blind people in Pakistan, especially dreaming, daydreaming, optimism, and emotional control. Through these dimensions, the research aims to make its contribution to the further understanding of subjective and sensory experience of blind people and increase the existing body of literature on the psychology of dreams.

Research Problem

Despite the growing body of research on dreaming and sensory perception, the subjective experiences of visually impaired individuals—particularly in relation to dream content—remain insufficiently explored. Existing studies have largely focused on experimental or quantitative approaches, often conducted in Western contexts, with limited attention to the lived experiences of blind individuals in developing countries such as Pakistan.

Moreover, while previous research has established that blind individuals experience dreams differently from sighted individuals—particularly in terms of reduced or absent visual imagery—there is still a lack of comprehensive understanding of how multiple psychological dimensions, such as daydreaming, emotional regulation, and optimism, interact to shape these experiences. Most studies have examined these constructs in isolation, without integrating them into a unified framework.

In addition, there is a scarcity of qualitative, phenomenological research that captures how blind individuals interpret their dreams, perceive others within dream contexts, and distinguish between real and imagined experiences. This gap limits the ability to fully understand the psychological and emotional significance of dreams for visually impaired individuals.

Therefore, the present study seeks to address these gaps by exploring the content of dreams among blind individuals in Pakistan, with particular emphasis on dreaming, daydreaming, emotional regulation, and optimism, using a phenomenological approach.

Literature Review

Dreaming has long been a subject of scientific inquiry within psychology and neuroscience, with particular attention to its cognitive, emotional, and sensory dimensions. Early work by G. W. Domhoff (1996, 2003) established that dream content reflects waking-life experiences, suggesting a continuity between daily perception and dream construction. This perspective is especially relevant when examining dream experiences among visually impaired individuals, whose sensory environments differ significantly from those of sighted individuals.

Research on dream content among blind individuals has demonstrated that the absence or limitation of visual perception fundamentally alters the structure of dreams. A seminal study by Christina S. Hurovitz et al. (1999) found that individuals who are blind from birth do not experience visual imagery in their dreams; instead, their dreams are dominated by auditory, tactile, and emotional elements. In contrast, individuals who become blind later in life often retain visual components in their dreams due to previously acquired visual memory.

These findings are further supported by A. Meaidi et al. (2014), who conducted a comparative study on congenitally blind, late-blind, and sighted individuals. Their results indicated that blind participants reported significantly higher levels of non-visual sensory experiences, including touch, movement, and sound, while visual content was largely absent among those blind from birth. This highlights the adaptive nature of the human mind in constructing dream experiences based on available sensory inputs.

In addition to sensory differences, emotional and psychological dimensions play a crucial role in shaping dream content. Studies suggest that dreams often reflect individuals' emotional states, concerns, and social experiences. For example, Levin and Nielsen (2009) proposed that nightmares and emotionally intense dreams are linked to emotional dysregulation, indicating that dream content can serve as a mechanism for processing stress and trauma. This is particularly relevant for visually impaired individuals, who may experience heightened emotional sensitivity due to social and environmental challenges.

Daydreaming, as a related cognitive process, has also been widely studied in psychological literature. According to Smallwood and Schooler (2015), daydreaming represents a form of spontaneous cognition that allows individuals to simulate alternative scenarios, reflect on personal experiences, and regulate emotions. Similarly, Klinger (2009) emphasised that daydreaming plays an important role in goal setting, motivation, and emotional coping. For visually impaired individuals, daydreaming may

serve as a compensatory mechanism, enabling them to construct imagined experiences that are not accessible in their physical environment.

Furthermore, emotional regulation has been identified as a key factor influencing both dreaming and daydreaming processes. Gross (1998) defined emotional regulation as the processes by which individuals influence their emotions, including how they experience and express them. Research suggests that individuals with difficulties in emotional regulation are more likely to experience intense or negative dream content (Levin & Nielsen, 2009). This relationship highlights the importance of understanding emotional processes in the context of dream experiences among blind individuals.

Optimism is another psychological construct that has been linked to well-being and cognitive processing. Carver and Scheier (2014) argue that optimism contributes to better coping strategies and resilience in the face of adversity. For visually impaired individuals, optimism may influence how they interpret both real-life experiences and dream content, shaping their perceptions of self and future possibilities.

Despite these contributions, the existing literature reveals several gaps. Most studies on dream content among blind individuals have been conducted in Western contexts and have primarily focused on quantitative or experimental designs. There is limited research adopting qualitative, phenomenological approaches that explore the lived experiences of blind individuals, particularly within developing countries such as Pakistan. Moreover, few studies have integrated multiple psychological constructs—such as dreaming, daydreaming, emotional regulation, and optimism—within a single analytical framework.

Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by employing a phenomenological approach to explore the dream experiences of visually impaired individuals in Pakistan. By integrating multiple psychological dimensions, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how blind individuals perceive, interpret, and emotionally engage with their dreams.

Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore the content and meaning of dreams among visually impaired individuals. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Examine the nature and structure of dream experiences among blind individuals.
2. Investigate the role of daydreaming in shaping internal experiences.
3. Analyse the relationship between dream content and emotional regulation.
4. Explore the influence of optimism on dream interpretation and perception.

5. Understand how blind individuals perceive people, events, and reality within their dreams.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the main characteristics of dream experiences among blind individuals?
2. How do daydreaming, optimism, and emotional regulation influence these experiences?
3. How are real-life people, events, and relationships represented in the dreams of blind individuals?

Theoretical Framework

This paper is based on two key theoretical approaches the Frustration-Aggression Theory and the Public Choice Theory. These typologies offer a practical foundation to the explanation of the development as well as the continuation of terrorism, especially to the Nigerian setting.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on a phenomenological approach in order to explore the lived experiences of visually impaired individuals in relation to their dream content. The phenomenological method is particularly suitable for capturing subjective meanings, perceptions, and interpretations, allowing for an in-depth understanding of how blind individuals experience dreaming, daydreaming, optimism, and emotional regulation.

Participants and Sampling

The study employed a purposive and snowball sampling technique to recruit participants with relevant lived experiences. A total of 16 visually impaired individuals participated in the study, including both totally blind and partially blind individuals.

Participants were selected from various regions of Pakistan, including Gilgit, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Sindh, Kohat, Hassan Abdal, Wah Cantt, Rawalpindi, and Islamabad. This geographical diversity enhances the richness and variation of the data collected.

All participants voluntarily agreed to take part in the study and provided informed consent prior to data collection.

Instrument of Data Collection.

This was done through semi-structured interview guide which was designed by the researchers to collect data. Experts went through the interview guide and made it clear and relevant.

The tool was divided into two parts:

Miscellaneous demographic information sheet, which contained demographics like age, gender, education, socio-economic status, years of blindness, and family history.

Open-ended interview questions that were meant to cover major dimensions of the study, such as dreaming, daydreaming, optimism, and emotional regulation.

The semi-structured interview format gave the participants the freedom to discuss their experiences as well as provide homogeneity between interviews.

Data Collection Procedure

Individual, face-to-face interviews have been used to gather data, and the one-to-one approach has been applied. Before the interview process, the participants had been informed of the aim of the study and well-informed.

This process was carried out through interviews, which included studying the experience of dreams amongst the participants, what they dream of, how they perceive people and events in the dream, how they feel about it, and their attitude towards dreaming as well as daydreaming. The interviews were held in a somewhat structured and yet flexible way, which gave the participants an opportunity to discuss their experience in greater detail.

Interviews were all conducted in an ethical manner where confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed in carrying out the research.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the data, in accordance with the model offered by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006). The reason behind such a choice was that this was the most appropriate approach of determining patterns and themes in qualitative data.

Six main steps were incorporated in the analysis: Acclimatisation to the information. Generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report

The chosen method was inductive whereby themes were derived out of the data. Coding of the interview transcripts was done carefully and the similar codes were merged into broad themes based on what the participants experienced and perceived.

Ethical Considerations

Data collection was done with ethical approval. The participants were made perfectly aware of the study aim and consent was taken as required among participants or their guardians.

Anonymity and confidentiality were highly observed and the participants were assured that the responses would be utilized within the research.

Results

The results of this study are presented below based on the thematic analysis of the interview data collected from visually impaired participants.

Overview of Identified Themes

Table 1

Summary of Main Themes and Sub-Themes

Main Theme	Sub-Themes
Dream Content	Sensory experiences, emotional elements, memory-based imagery
Sensory Modalities	Auditory, tactile, and kinaesthetic experiences
Daydreaming	Imagination, future aspirations, internal narratives
Emotional Regulation	Coping mechanisms, stress processing, emotional expression
Social Perception	Representation of people, relationships, and interactions

Table 1 illustrates the key themes found with the use of the thematic analysis. The results show that the dream experiences of the visually impaired people are multidimensional with sensory, emotional and social aspects involved. These themes indicate the intricate aspects of how the participants create and make meaning out of their dream experiences.

Theme 1: Dream Content

Table 2

Dream Content Characteristics

Sub-Theme	Description
Sensory Experiences	Dreams are primarily based on sound, touch, and movement
Emotional Elements	Dreams often include strong feelings such as fear, happiness, or anxiety
Memory-Based Content	Dreams reflect past experiences and personal memories

The results show that the dream content of the visually impaired individuals is mostly influenced by non visual sense experiences. The participants said that they use auditory and tactile senses in their dreams as opposed to visual imagery. Emotional aspects also become core and the assumption is that dreams are used as a processing system of emotions and experiences. Participants who became blind in old age said that they occasionally had visual images, though congenitally blind participants said that they only had non-visual dreams.

Theme 2: Sensory Modalities

Table 3
Sensory Experiences in Dreams

Sensory Type	Description
Auditory	Voices, sounds, and environmental noise
Tactile	Physical sensations such as touch and movement
Kinaesthetic	Body movement and spatial awareness

The findings indicate that blind people experience auditory and tactile modalities in their dreams more than any other modalities. Often, participants reported that they heard voices, saw people with their ears, and touched them by touching. This is an indication of alternative channels of sense use as a means of adapting to the lack of sight.

Theme 3: Daydreaming

Table 4
Characteristics of Daydreaming

Sub-Theme	Description
Imagination	Creation of imagined scenarios and environments
Aspirations	Future goals and personal ambitions
Internal Narratives	Ongoing mental stories and reflections

The daydreaming was identified as a rather important determinant of the inner world of the participants. Most participants also said that they used daydreaming to envision the possibilities in the future and create meaningful mental images. This implies that daydreaming is a thinking and emotional coping process.

Theme 4: Emotional Regulation
Table 5
Emotional Regulation in Dreams

Sub-Theme	Description
Coping Mechanisms	Managing stress and negative emotions
Emotional Processing	Understanding and expressing feelings
Psychological Adjustment	Adapting to life challenges

The results show that dreams play a role in emotion regulation among the visually impaired people. The participants cited that dreams assist them in their process of stress, fears and day to day challenges. Here, the significance of dreaming as a psychologically important process is depicted as a tool of emotional balance.

Theme 5: Social Perception

Table 6

Social Representation in Dream

Sub-Theme	Description
Representation of People	Recognition through voice or behavior
Relationships	Family, friends, and social connections
Social Interaction	Conversations and interactions within dreams

The outcomes indicate that the social relationship is highly portrayed in dreams. Participants noted that they identified them based on voice, personality and interaction patterns and not their visual appearance. It means that lived experiences and non-visual stimuli define social perception in dreams.

Discussion

This paper examined the dreaming experiences of the visually impaired in a phenomenological approach with specific focus on the sensory perception, emotional process as well as social representation. The results are important in understanding how the dreams of the blind people are built and understood where the visual input cannot exist or has been impaired.

The findings suggest that the content of dreams among the visually impaired relies mostly on the non-visual sense that is largely based on the auditory, tactile, and kinaesthetic senses. This is in line with the observation of Christina S. Hurovitz et al. (1999), who found out that congenitally blind people do not have visual imagery in dreams, and that they use other modalities. Likewise, A. Meaidi et al. (2014) observed that blind people describe more positive non-visual sensory impressions, such as sound and movement, which argues the point that dream constructions are a representation of the accessible sensory messages.

Moreover, it is established that the previous visual experience is also instrumental in controlling the content of the dream. Individuals who lost their sight later in the life said that they constantly saw some part of their dreams but congenitally blind individuals said that they saw absolutely nothing in their dreams. This is in line with continuity hypothesis by G. W. Domhoff (2003) that dream content has close relationship with the waking life experiences.

Another important point to be made according to the research is the role of emotions in dreams. Emotional elements such as fear, happiness and anxiety were often given by the participants. It contributes to the theoretical point of view of Levin and Nielsen (2009) who suppose that dreams are significant in emotional self-control and psychological stress management. The emotionally charged

contents of the dreams indicate the possibility of dreams as a conflict coping and life-daily coping mechanism.

More so, the results indicate that daydreaming is a valuable mental and emotional activity in visually impaired people. Participants reported daydreaming to create imaginary scenes, consider previous events, and fantasize about possible events in the future. It aligns with the theory of Smallwood and Schooler (2015) in which daydreaming is the spontaneous thought that adds to both emotional processing and cognitive flexibility.

The other significant observation is connected with the perception of other people in dreams. According to the participants, they identified people based on their voices, behaviour, and emotional attachment and not on their visual appearance. This implies that the social representation in dreams is constructed based on the lived experiences and non-visual sense perception. The results of such findings are indicative of the adaptive ability of the human mind to recreate social reality when visual data is not available.

Altogether, the paper proves that experience of dreams in visually impaired people is multidimensional and complicated due to the process of sensory adaptation, emotional processes, and interactions with other people. The results of the study add to the better comprehension of the psychological reality of blind people and the necessity to pay attention to the non-visual perception as the aspect of dreams study.

Conclusion

This paper examined the dreams experiences of blind people in a phenomenological approach, the sensory perception, daydreaming, emotional regulation and the social representation. The results show non-visual sensory modalities, such as auditory, tactile, and kinaesthetic experiences, have a major influence on the dream content of the blind.

The paper also shows that the occurrence or the absence of visual imagery in dreams is greatly determined by the development of visual deficiency. Those who lost sight later in life still retained certain aspects of vision but those blind at birth solely used other senses.

Moreover, dreams turned out to be significant in the emotional regulation, giving the participants an opportunity to process feelings, handle everyday situations, and have a psychological balance. Another conclusion that is presented in the outcomes is the significance of daydreaming as a mental and emotional activity, as one that favours imagination, personal reflection and futuristic thoughts.

Implications

The consequences of the study are significant to theory and practice. Theoretically, the research can add to the already existing literature since it offers a more profound insight into the role of sensory restrictions on the process of dream construction and psychological experiences. It further emphasizes the significance of combining various psychological constructs (dreaming, daydreaming and emotional control) under a single framework.

Practically, the findings focus on the necessity to be more aware of the emotional and psychological life of visually impaired people. Counselling and rehabilitation professionals in the education sector need to look into how dreams and inner mental activities can be used in promoting emotional health. Also, the current understanding can be employed in interventions designed to improve coping mechanisms and emotional resilience in the context of visually impaired people.

Limitations

This study has a number of limitations, although it has made its contributions. The purposive and snowball sampling methods could create a biased selection and the sample size used is relatively small, which could limit the generalisability of the results.

Moreover, the research is based on self-reported information, which can be affected by personal meanings and the recollection of the participants. The qualitative character of the study, in addition to offering detailed and insightful information, inhibits the process of extrapolating the results to larger populations.

Future Research Recommendations.

In future studies, large and more diverse samples are to be considered to increase the generalisability of the findings. Further information about differences between dream experiences could be gathered by comparative studies conducted between blind and sighted people.

Furthermore, the mixed-method designs, which incorporate the qualitative and quantitative methods, could also provide a more in-depth insight into the nature of dreaming and the associated psychological mechanisms. Longitudinal research may be also used to investigate the dynamics of the dream experiences, especially concerning the sensory perception and life situations.

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